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AUTHOR Wolf, Judith M.
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ABSTRACT

The University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Department of Education joined forces to design and implement a course to prepare regular educators to work with handicapped children. The purposes of the course were to present a rationale and philosophy for integrating special needs children into mainstream settings and to offer a variety of intervention strategies to accomplish mainstreaming in the classroom. The course content was selected by a modified goal analysis method. The following areas were designated as important and served as the content units in the course: normal child development, issues in integrating handicapped children into mainstream settings, parent involvement and training, attitudes and myths concerning handicapped children, identification and assessment techniques, behavior management, and programming skills with handicapped children. Students were exposed to a variety of teaching methods in the 10 sessions that made up the two-week course. The students evaluated each session and made recommendations. In the future, students could be clustered by background and need, topics could be organized into more palatable units, and course continuity could be assured by encouraging the instructor to play a more dominating role in instruction and selection of lecturers. (Author/IRT)

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Designing and Implementing a Mainstream Course for Regular Early Educators[1]

Judith M. Wolf[2]

A recent trend in education is to move handicapped children away from self-contained special classes toward a more normal experience in the regular class setting. This trend is being referred to as "mainstreaming." Until recently in early education, as well as in elementary and secondary education, handicapped children were served in segregated settings such as the day activity center or special preschool program for the mentally or physically impaired. The mainstreaming movement, coupled with the additional pressure of the mandate to include at least 10 percent handicapped children in all Headstart programs, has created a need to prepare teachers of the normal preschool child to accept and include handicapped children in their programs.

Purpose

The Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) of the University of Minnesota and the University, State Department and Public Schools (UNISTAPS) project of the Minnesota State Department of Education joined forces to design and implement a course to prepare regular educators to work with handicapped children. The course was entitled, "Early Education and Development: Integrating Children with Special Needs." The purposes of the course were to present a rationale and philosophy for integrating special needs children into mainstream settings and to offer a variety of intervention strategies to accomplish mainstreaming in the classroom.

Designing the Course

A workshop instructor and a teaching assistant were hired to plan the design and implementation of the course. Course content was selected using

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a modified goal analysis method. Five professionals employed by various private, state and federal agencies in early education were invited to participate as a goal analysis team. Each goal analysis team member was asked to submit four goal statements for the course one week before the goal analysis meeting was scheduled. Upon receipt of these goal statements, the course instructors clustered the goal statements by topic and presented a list of these content areas to each goal team member at the goal analysis meeting. The goal analysis session was directed by the course instructor, but she did not participate in the goal-setting activities. Objectives of the goal analysis session were as follows:

- Rate each goal in terms of course priorities.
- Rate each goal in terms of student need for knowledge.
- Order goal statements according to importance and need for course.
- Generate an overall content plan for course and suggest appropriate individuals who might offer input as instructors or consultants.

The course design was built directly upon consensus agreements of the goal analysis team members. The following major areas were designated as important and consequently served as the content units in the course:

- normal child development,
- issues in integrating handicapped children into mainstream settings,
- parent involvement and training,
- attitudes and myths concerning handicapped children,
- identification and assessment techniques,
- behavior management, and
- programming skills with handicapped children.

A variety of consultants and instructors were asked to participate in the course. They contributed course materials which were edited and organized

into a course manual to be given to each student at the beginning of the two-week course.

Students were recruited through a variety of early education and special education organizations in the state. The response far surpassed initial expectations, so that 50 students were randomly selected from a pool of over 100 students who applied for entrance into the course. These 50 students came to the course with a variety of educational backgrounds: nine special education educators; three speech clinicians; four kindergarten or primary teachers; two college educators; fourteen Headstart directors or teachers; seven day care teachers; seven nursery school teachers; one special education coordinator in the State Department of Education; and one registered nurse. The educational level and amount of experience with preschool children within the group was as varied as their backgrounds.

Implementation

Ten two and one-half hour afternoon sessions took place over the two-week course session. Students experienced a great variety of content delivery systems. Several sessions were taught in a lecture format, although class discussion was always encouraged. Many speakers used audio-visual aids, i.e., transparencies or slides, to emphasize specific aspects of their topic or program. Panels organized on several topics stimulated discussion and interest. Brainstorming sessions on teaching skills and strategies produced insight and avid participation in the students. Displays of materials for use with handicapped children offered teachers an opportunity to plan for their own classroom experience in mainstreaming. Talking with parents of handicapped children brought needs and concerns to the surface and created an awareness and appreciation in the students. In addition, the last 45 minutes of each class session was devoted to a small group experience. Here, students met with

their support team, the same 12 individuals each day, in order to discuss the day's content or work on a project directly related to the day's activities. These support teams, as well as the introductory and concluding remarks offered by the instructor, served to bring continuity to the course.

Evaluation

Students were asked to complete course evaluations at the end of each class and a general evaluation on the last day of class. Although the daily evaluations were often seen as aversive or tiresome by most students, they proved to be very valuable for the assessment of this course and the development of future course offerings. For example, day-to-day evaluations showed interaction of speaker X topic. A desirable topic delivered by a dynamic speaker would often be rated the highest by the students, regardless of how well it fit into their overall goals for the course. Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the most frequent score and the score range for each item on each day's topic. (Day 10 was a summary session and was not rated separately.) Scores are clearly skewed in the "positive" direction. Topics rated highest included parent involvement, attitudes and myths, and teaching strategies.

The general evaluation conducted at the end of the course was also revealing of the topic X speaker interaction. In addition, the student's background seemed to play an important role in how the course was evaluated. Students, in general, approved of the arrangements, length of session, and format of the course. Suggestions included a shorter, more intensive experience for out-of-town students, morning sessions, and more variety in speaker format. Most students enjoyed the relatively informal atmosphere in the class and were pleased with the organizational aspects. All but six students said they thought a similar course should be offered again. These six students stated that course content was superb, but the format became tiring for them; they

Table 1.*

Evaluation by Students of Amount Learned by Topic

Day	Topic	Mode	Range
1	Child Development	4	2-6
2	Integrating Issues	5	3-7
3	Parent Involvement	7	5-7
4	Attitudes and Myths	6	3-7
5	Assessment	5	3-7
6	Programming	4	1-7
7	Child Management	4	1-7
8	Teaching Strategies	6	3-7
9	Parent Strategies	7	5-7

Table 2.*

Evaluation by Students of Amount Stimulated by Topic

Day	Topic	Mode	Range
1	Child Development	4	2-6
2	Integrating Issues	4	1-7
3	Parent Involvement	6	5-7
4	Attitudes and Myths	7	4-7
5	Assessment	5	3-7
6	Programming	4	2-7
7	Child Management	3	1-7
8	Teaching Strategies	5	2-7
9	Parent Strategies	7	5-7

* Ratings were based on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating "least" and 7 indicating "most."

Table 3.*

Evaluation of Student's Level of Satisfaction

Day	Topic	Mode	Range
1	Child Development	7	5-7
2	Integrating Issues	5	3-7
3	Parent Involvement	7	5-7
4	Attitudes and Myths	6	5-7
5	Assessment	5	4-7
6	Programming	6	2-7
7	Child Management	4	1-7
8	Teaching Strategies	6	4-7
9	Parent Strategies	7	5-7

* Ratings were based on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating "least" and 7 indicating "most."

suggested exploring alternative delivery systems. Students were also asked to rate the course handouts, how much new information they received, how much they were able to build the daily lectures into a comprehensive whole, how successfully their personal course goals were met, and how satisfied they felt about the course in general. In resporse, students indicated that the handouts were useful, they gained much new information, they were able to integrate daily lectures into a comprehensive whole, they had some or most of their goals met, and they felt quite satisfied with the course.

For a large proportion of students (50 percent), the sessions concerning parents and panel discussions were the best part of the course. Other topics rated as "best" by several of the students included specific techniques for dealing with hearing impaired and visually impaired children, attitudes and myths about handicapping conditions, the support teams, the observation information, the handouts, and the general organization of the workshop.

Some of the worst parts of the course, as suggested by the students, included sessions on child management (they rated the speaker low, not the topic), theoretical sessions, listening to speakers each day and small group work.

Recommendations from the class included:

- Planning more action oriented class sessions involving classroom observations and opportunities to practice observing children;
- offering more specific programming techniques;
- designing small workshops devoted to specific handicapping conditions;
- providing more information on children with behavior problems;
- offering information on legal issues in integrating preschool children;
- providing more information on resources available;
- providing more reference lists;

- clustering students in future workshops by professional background; and
- presenting more models useful in integrating children.

Another interesting dimension revealed in the final evaluations was the relationship between the student's professional background and the ratings and comments expressed on the evaluation form. Upon inspection, Headstart and public school teachers rated the course the highest and made the most positive comments about the design and content of the course. Day care personnel, speech clincians, and others (nurse, administrator, and college instructor) also stated their satisfaction with the course. The only group to rate any dissatisfaction with the course were the nursery school teachers. Three of them expressed a need for methods and materials that would either precede this course in providing a background of special needs, or follow the course providing information on specific handicapping conditions and techniques for dealing with them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Suggestions for future courses on mainstreaming or related topics seem to cluster into four areas: students, content, management, and evaluation.

It would seem more useful and efficient to teach smaller, more homogeneous groups of teachers, possibly in an intensive workshop format or a weekly seminar setting. A needs assessment should be conducted on the selected population(s) and a course designed that would be tailored more suitably to the expressed needs and educational level of the students. Additional populations could be recruited such as psychologists, school administrators, nurses and pediatricians.

Course content should be condensed and solidified so that topics of need could be intensively presented and practiced, and other areas dealt with through reference lists or self-teaching packets. With the varying student-professional

background, two clusters of content topics surfaced during the course: issues and ideas, and teaching/programming techniques. As a result, plans for developing two sets of content are being considered.

Course evaluation suggestions include elimination of daily evaluation forms and use of a more comprehensive less objective final evaluation questionnaire and possibly a field-based measure of course usefulness as well as student competency.

In general, the course was a useful experience. Students enjoyed their speakers and discussions, began to utilize one another and their instructors as resources, and gained a variety of methods and materials on integrating handicapped children into normal preschool settings. However, the group was a demanding one because of its diversity and enormous range of education and experience. In the future, students could be clustered by background and need, topics could be organized into more palatable units, and course continuity could be assured by encouraging the instructor to play a more dominating role in instruction and selection of lecturers.

Footnotes

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[2]Judith Wolf is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Administration and the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota.